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ABSTRACT

Although sports historians have not often dealt with the athletic club movement of the late 1800s and early 1900s, much of the credit for the institutionalization of sport as a significant aspect of American culture should be attributed to these clubs. The athletic club movement began with the founding of the New York Athletic Club in 1866. By 1880 other clubs were well-established and the various clubs soon became more selective in terms of membership and more concerned with facilities in an attempt to become the leading athletic club. The 1890s, however, were noted for club bankruptcies and consolidations. The difficulties experienced by athletic clubs during this period were due basically to poor management and the overextension of financial resources to acquire property and expand facilities. Although the elite clubs which survived the 1890s continued to prosper in the early 1900s, this was a period in which neighborhood athletic clubs, occupational athletic clubs, and clubs organized by other small groups specifically for athletic competition fourished. The social strata represented in these clubs was increasingly lower middle class and working class, and the clubs were generally without facilities and the social preoccupations of the 1880s. (Included are data on membership requirements, dues, and athletic club policies.) (PB)

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# Social Stratification in New York City

## Athletic Clubs, 1865-1915

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Perhaps insufficient credit has been given in the past to the role of athletic clubs in the development of sport in the United States. Noted sports historians such as Betts and Krout have but mentioned the athletic club phenomenon of the late 1800's and early 1900's.[1] This is indeed unfortunate since the athletic club movement did much to popularize and lend respectability to amateur athletics, especially track and field, at a time when this sport was largely the provenance of promoters and professional pedestrians. The athletic clubs of this era also provided the leadership in the formation of national athletic organizations to govern amateur sport, fostered the development of many sports, and provided competition at the national level. Much of the credit for the institutionalizing of sport as a significant aspect of the American culture should be attributed to the early athletic clubs.

This is a study of the athletic clubs of New York City during the years 1865 to 1915. This span of years includes three phases of athletic club development: the period of the large, powerful and exclusive athletic clubs, a period of transition, and the rise of the lower middle class and working class athletic clubs. Of special concern in this study was the social class make-up of the athletic clubs and the struggle among the elite clubs for status and prestige

## The Age of the Exclusive Athletic Clubs

Although predated by numerous boat, cricket and baseball clubs, the athletic club movement in the United States in reality began with the founding of the New York A.C. in 1866. After a rather tenuous beginning

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[1] John R. Betts, America's Sporting Heritage: 1850-1950 (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1974), pp. 98-101; John A. Krout, Annals of American Sport (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), pp. 185-189.

the club had grown to fourteen members by 1868 and was a viable organization by 1870. The decade of the 1870's in amateur sport was dominated in every way by the New York A.C. Many other clubs were beginning to organize during this period, the most notable of which, were the Manhattan A.C. and the Harlem A.C. in 1876, and the Scottish-American and Staten Island Club the following year. None of these clubs could seriously challenge the athletic supremacy and influence of the New York A.C. until after 1880.

Preoccupation with Facilities

Prior to 1880 athletic clubs essentially functioned to promote the athletic participation of its members. Shortly thereafter the clubs began to acquire more and more of the characteristics of social clubs. As this trend accelerated clubs became more selective in terms of membership and developed an insatiable penchant for luxurious clubhouses and other trappings which symbolized wealth and success. The race for status, prestige and the title of the "leading" athletic club narrowed to the Manhattan A.C. and New York A.C. by the late 1880's. Not all of the clubs of the 1880's fell into the pattern outlined above. The American A.C. which was made up largely of members of the YMCA retained their primary focus on athletics as did the athletic clubs which developed from local units of the New York State National Guard. There were however several clubs which tried to establish themselves among the elite groups but faltered rather quickly. Most notable of these were the Harlem A.C., the Williamsburg A.C. of Brooklyn and the Scottish-American Club.[2]

The New York A.C. was the first in the city to build an elaborate

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[2]Frederick W. Janssen, History of American Amateur Athletics. New York: Charles R. Bourne, 1885), p. 107.

clubhouse. After almost twenty years of moving from one leased gymnasium to another, the club opened the doors of its five story $150,000 clubhouse in 1885.[3] This clubhouse immediately became the envy of all other athletic clubs in the city and set the standard for other clubs to emulate. Two clubs, however, were not far behind in opening facilities of their own. The Staten Island A.C. announced the purchase of its new grounds and fifteen room mansion in March, 1886 followed by the opening of the Manhattan A.C.'s clubhouse on Fifth Avenue in November of the same year.[4] The Berkeley A.C. opened the doors of its commodious building in 1888.[5] To be considered a leading club, it was absolutely essential to have a clubhouse with at least the following features: gymnasium, swimming pool, club rooms and dining rooms. In addition, some clubs had bowling alleys, rifle ranges, Russian and Turkish baths, sleeping rooms, billard parlors, ball rooms, and theaters.[6]

Invidious comparisons between clubs were common. When the New York A.C. opened its clubhouse it was proclaimed to be "...a clubhouse such as no other athletic organization in the world can boast of."[7] When after only two years the Manhattan A.C.'s facility proved to be somewhat less imposing than they wished, the club announced plans to build a new clubhouse which would be "...the largest, handsomest and best appointed in the

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[3] New York Times, March 21, 1885, p. 3.

[4] Ibid., November 18, 1886, p. 8.

[5] Berkeley Athletic Club. (New York: Berkeley Athletic Club, 1888), p. 8.

[6] New York Times, February 6, 1885, p. 2.

[7] Ibid.

United States." Included in the plans was a pool which would be more than twice as large as that of the New York A.C.[8] When the new building was completed two years later it was described by the press as "...a magnificient and palatial clubhouse...which ranks today as the finest athletic clubhouse in the world. From roof to cellar everything's complete and the best. The artistic decorations throughout are worthy of study."[9] In every respect this clubhouse went beyond the New York A.C.'s. Its 1500 seat concert hall and dining hall were without peer. The gymnasium was described as the "...finest in the world, superior in every way to that of the New York A.C., the Columbia A.C., the Boston A.C. and the Harvard Gymnasium." One unprecented feature of the gymnasium was an arrangement representing a sloop with its complete rig and wheel for the teaching of yachting. The roof contained a garden and outdoor dining area which could be converted to a skating rink in the winter.[10] Although not quite so lavish as the above, the Berkeley A.C., the Staten Island A.C. and the Crescent A.C. of Brooklyn were above the ordinary with respect to club facilities.

The standard for outdoor facilities was also set by the New York A.C. As early as 1870 the club had a boat house on the Harlem River. In 1874 the club purchased a plot of ground at Mott Haven where, at considerable expense, the land was leveled and a one-fifth of a mile cinder track was built, the first such track in the country. There also the club built "...grandstands suitable for the fair sex, dressing houses for contestants,"

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[8] Ibid., July 15, 1888, p. 9.

[9] Sprit of the Times, December 6, 1890, p. 767.

[10] Ibid.

"...a tall fence capable of baffling the most athletic efforts of the small boy."[11] The purchase of Travers Island in 1888 as a summer home and country club completed the list of "essential" facilities for the New York A.C. By 1913 Travers Island represented an investment of a half-million dollars and was modestly described as "...probably unequaled in the world."[12]

No club could seriously rival the total facilities of the New York A.C., however some clubs tried to outdo their chief competitor in one department or the other. One claimant for honors as the outstanding track in the country was the Berkeley Oval. Club members bragged that it "...has no superior in America as a field for such games, and art has aided nature in making the grounds beautiful."[13] This claim was quickly countered by the declaration that

> ...Travers Island is the most beautiful athletic ground in the world. The Berkeley Oval is charming, but has no water view, while on every hand at Travers Island are bays, inlets and stretches of the Sound.[14]

The Manhattan A.C.'s entry in the outdoor facilities sweepstakes included a one-quarter mile track with the first 220 yard straightaway in the country.[15] A few years later the club leased a larger plot of ground which permitted the construction of facilities for tennis, lacrosse, baseball, football, bicycling, shooting as well as track and field.[16]

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[11] New York Athletic Club, Opening Reception of New Club House (New York: New York Athletic Club, 1885), p. 4.

[12] New York Times, July 18, 1913, p. 9.

[13] Spirit of the Times, June 20, 1891, p. 992.

[14] Ibid., June 27, 1891, p. 1012.

[15] New York Times, June 17, 1883, p. 5.

[16] Ibid., March 8, 1891, p. 2.

Not to be outdone with regard to a summer home and country club, the Manhattan Club purchased Berrian Island, a forty acre plot adjacent to Long Island with the intention of developing a complete country home and yacht basin.[17] The comparative wealth in terms of property owned and number of members of the most elite clubs is shown in the following table.[18]

TABLE I

Value of Property and Number of Members of Five Athletic Clubs in 1896

| Club | Number of Members | Value of Property Owned |
|---|---|---|
| Manhattan A.C. | 2,500 | $ 850,000 |
| New York A.C. | 2,500 | $ 800,000 |
| Crescent A.C. | 1,800 | $ 100,000 |
| Staten Island A.C. | 800 | $ 100,000 |
| University A.C. | 700 | $ 50,000 |

The Social Element

A primary reason for the intense interest in property and facilities of a non-athletic nature among the elite athletic clubs was the broadening of scope to include more and more activities of a social nature. As athletes became too old to compete many of them wished to remain active in matters of the club. The broadening of social opportunities permitted this type of association. The increased emphasis upon the "social element" undoubtedly helped to swell membership rolls by attracting non-athletic

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[17] Spirit of the Times, October 11, 1890, p. 480.

[18] Frederick W. Janssen, in William V. Miller (ed.), Select Organizations in the United States (New York: The Knickerbocker Publishing Company, 1896), p. 224.

individuals. The growing social nature of the athletic clubs accounted for much of the demand for ever increasing opulence.

Another facet of the broadening of scope had to do with increasing pressures for women to be involved in club activities. Activities for the entertainment of the fair sex included skating and sleighing parties, concerts, tennis and even "ladies days" in which women took possession of club facilities. Clubs differed in the degree to which they permitted participation by women. The Staten Island Cricket and Baseball Club and the Berkeley A.C. built elaborate facilities exclusively for the use of their ladies. The latter club assisted also in setting up the Berkeley Ladies A.C. which was a first class athletic club in every respect.[19] The Staten Island club also built tennis courts expressly for female enjoyment. The ladies of the Brooklyn A.C. were permitted to take "absolute possession of the billiard and bowling facilities on Mondays and Fridays." This was one area in which the New York A.C. was not a pioneer, permitting women in their clubhouse only twice each year.[20]

The trend toward increasingly more social affairs within athletic clubs disturbed many members who were concerned primarily with athletic competition. The internal dissension brought about by these two basically different orientations was a major source of controversy. The New York A.C. was badly split into two factions along these lines in 1886. The athletic faction wanted to regain the athletic supremacy which had been lost to the Manhattan A.C., while the socially oriented group was seeking

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[19] Berkeley A.A., The Berkeley Ladies Athletic Club (New York: Berkeley Athletic Association, 1891), p. 7.

[20] New York Times, December 25, 1886, p. 2.

to expand their activities still further.[21] The Manhattan A.C. was not without similar difficulties. Growing dissatisfaction with the social element surfaced in 1891 shortly after the club had moved into its palatial new clubhouse on Madison Avenue. In the words of one member of the athletic faction the difficulty was explained:

> to understand properly the difficulty we must go back a little to the days when the Manhattan Athletic Club did not have the finest house, the largest membership roll, and the biggest annual income of any club in Christendom. We always held a high rank in athletic organizations, but we never held much standing in the club world proper. Our rival, the New York Athletic Club, always looked out for the social side of its existence, but the Manhattans have not until very recently. In our modest Fifth Avenue clubhouse, as long as our champions won prizes and the house was comfortable, the boys were satisfied...[22]

The Brooklyn A.C. expelled one of its members, Austin F. Remsen, who had voiced his protest of the encroachment of the social element by singing "objectionable" songs in the club parlor when ladies were present. Remsen filed suit for reinstatement citing many friends among the athletes of the club who objected to the introduction of the social feature into the club.[23] One of the most vocal critics of this trend was Frederick W. Janssen of the Staten Island A.C. who stated that the social element slowly but surely caused a club to become athletic in name only. Janssen, who blamed this factor for the demise of the Harlem A.C., the Scottish-American, the Williamsburg A.C., and other clubs, warned of its dangers.

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[21] New York Times, March 4, 1886.

[22] New York Times, March 23, 1891, p. 5.

[23] New York Times, April 20, 1887, p. 8.

> The social element in Clubs is like 'dry rot' and eats into the vitals of athletic clubs, and soon causes them to fail in the purpose for which they were organized. . . . It is like an octupus that squeezes the life-blood out of the organization by burdening it with debt. Palatial club houses are erected at great cost and money is spent in adorning them that, if used to beautify athletic grounds and improve tracks, would cause a wide-spread interest in athletic sports and further the development of the wind and muscles of American youth.[24]

In spite of formidable opposition and the prophetic pleading of Janssen, the social feature was too deeply ingrained to be eradicated. This ultimately proved to be one of the primary factors in bankruptcy of several clubs in the following decade.

Class Consciousness

The recognition of social position as a requisite to belonging to the elite athletic clubs is evidenced by the membership policies of the leading clubs. The prototype, as always, was the New York A.C. which required a "...written application, dated, stating full name, residence, and place of business of the candidate, signed by the members proposing and seconding him, with such references and remarks as they may have to make..."[25] Such information allowed the membership committee to accurately "place" an applicant in the social hierarchy and determine if he met club standards. Another effective screening device was the initiation fee and yearly charge employed by most clubs. It was reasoned that if the costs were kept high enough undesirables and men with "unclubbable" qualities would be discouraged. The costs of belonging to selected clubs is summarized in the following table.

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[24]Frederick W. Janssen, History of American Amateur Athletics, p. 103.

[25]New York Athletic Club. New York Athletic Club Constitution and By-laws, (New York: New York Athletic Club, 1886), p. 11.

TABLE II

Initiation Fee and Yearly Charge of Various Clubs[26A-F]

| Club | Number of Members | Initiation Fee | Yearly Charge | Year |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| New York A.C. | 2,700 | $ 100 | $ 50 | 1893[a] |
| University A.C. | 700 | $ 100 | $ 50 | 1893[a] |
| Manhattan A.C. | 3,000 | $ 50 | $ 40 | 1893[a] |
| Knickerbocker A.C. | 1,100 | $ 50 | $ 40 | 1899[b] |
| Berkeley A.C. | 350 | $ 40 | $ 30 | 1888[c] |
| Crescent A.C. | 1,400 | $ 30 | $ 25 | 1891[d] |
| Actor's Amateur A.C. | 100 | $ 15 | $ 12 | 1889[e] |
| Williamsburg A.C. | 700 | None | $ 12 | 1885[f] |
| St. George's A.C. | 400 | None | $ 8 | 1895[g] |

The costs of belonging to a club accurately reflected the socio-economic level of the club. As an example of this point, the Williamsburg A.C. which competed quite successfully in athletics for a time was definitely a working class athletic club. For only one dollar a month a person could belong to this club. Provisions were also made for those who found the one dollar too much to pay out in one lump sum; they were permitted to pay twenty-five cents per week.[27] Unfortunately lower class

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[26A] Club Men of New York (New York, The Republic Press, 1898).

[B] Knickerbocker Athletic Club, Club Book, (1899), p. 48.

[C] Berkeley Athletic Club (New York, Berkeley A.C., 1888), p. 19.

[D] Crescent Athletic Club, Club Book, (1891), p. 20.

[E] Actor's Amateur Athletic Association of America, Constitution, By-laws, Rules and Alphabetical Lists of Members, (New York: Equity Press, 1889), p. 7.

[F] Janssen, History of American Amateur Athletics, pp. 63-72.

[G] St. George's Athletic Club, Minstrel Entertainment and Reception, (1895). No page numbers.

[27] Janssen, op. cit., p. 72.

class clubs such as the Williamsburg A.C. had great difficulty staying in operation during this era which greatly reduced the opportunities for athletes without means. Janssen summed up the situation in the following manner:

> The youths who participate in health-giving competition, as a rule, cannot afford the expense of membership to the so-called Athletic Clubs and they retire in favor of the wealthy young man whose sole claim to athletic distinction is his connection with a 'high tone' club.[28]

The system of screening prospective members sometimes faltered somewhat in the rush to continually grow. This as well as overt class consciousness is evident in a quote from an unhappy member of the Manhattan A.C.

> They did not knowingly pass undesirable men but they did not exercise enough caution in the matter, and in the 50 to 150 men they elected at every meeting there are many of unclubbable qualities and no social position. For instance, the janitor of a big downtown office building was passed by them, and the members of our club, who are also his tenants are in a disgruntled state of mind. I have no aspersions to cast on men who work for their living with their hands, but they are not exactly desirable members for a club which wants to establish itself on the plane of social clubdom.[29]

An even more elitist position was expressed by those who, in 1891, were considering the establishment of the University A.C.

> In a general way, it may be said that their scheme provides for a club which shall combine the exclusiveness of the University Club, all the athletic features of the big athletic clubs, and the social attractions if the first-class avenue clubs. Memberships will be restricted to college graduates, or, at least to those who have passed a portion of their time in college halls.[30]

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[28] Ibid., p. 103.

[29] New York Times, March 23, 1891, p. 5.

[30] New York Times, November 29, 1891, p. 10.

Commenting on the chances of success for a club of this type, a comparison was made with the highly successful Crescent A.C. of Brooklyn which was founded by a similar group of college men.

> If a club of this sort can pick 1500 members in a City like Brooklyn, lacking as it does, the exclusiveness of a purely college club, it is certain that a club of the sort restricted to college men could easily gather in two or three thousand members in a real city like New York.[31]

When the University A.C. became a reality later in the same year it did indeed require that all applicants have a degree from a university or college. Although not an official policy, the specific college or university was undoubtedly important as indicated in the following breakdown of members' alma maters from the club roster.[32]

TABLE III

Alma Maters of University A.C. Members, 1893

| College | Number of University A.C. Members |
|---|---|
| Yale | 170 |
| Harvard | 66 |
| Princeton | 63 |
| Columbia | 47 |
| Amherst | 22 |
| Dartmouth | 17 |
| Other | 63 |

As a final measure of assuring that the club would retain its exclusiveness and remain aloof from the "ordinary" type of athletic club, the

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[31] Ibid.

[32] University Athletic Club, Constitution, By-Laws, Rules, and List of Members, (New York: University Athletic Club, 1893), pp. 31-46.

University A.C. announced that it had no plans whatsoever to enter the race for the club championship nor become a member of the AAU.[33] Its avowed aim, according to the club constitution, was to "...furnish athletic facilities for its members, and to cultivate a love of athletic sports in the amateur spirit without a trace of professionalism."[34]

Some of the lower-middle class clubs also had standards for membership which sought to eliminate undesirables. The Brooklyn Athletic Association, the successor of the defunct Williamsburg A.C., attempted to include only the member who

> ...controls himself in every way better than the average man, is one that never indulges in excesses of any kind. That is the class of men that this Association caters to, and it rejects all applicants for membership whose admission might be questioned. There is but one way to make a successful club and that is to select the members with care.[35]

The question as to which athletic club was in reality the most exclusive was one of considerable interest to the writers. The problem of how to determine this in an objective manner posed a major procedural problem. It was decided to use the NORC Scale of Occupational Prestige, sometimes referred to as the North-Hatt Scale.[36] This scale which was developed in 1947 by Cecil North and Paul Hatt, in conjunction with the National Opinion Research Center, lists in hierarchal order in terms of prestige common occupations in the United States. In the scale, each occupation has a prestige score which can be placed along a continuum

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[33] New York Times, January 3, 1892, p. 19.

[34] University Athletic Club, op. cit., p. 7.

[35] Brooklyn Athletic Association, First Annual Spring Meeting (New York: Hendricks and Furlong, 1886), p. 4.

[36] Albert J. Reiss, Occupations and Social Status (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc.), pp. 54-57.

ranging from shoe shiner (33), the lowest, to U.S. Supreme Court Justice (96), the highest. Although the instrument was developed in a different time period it was felt that occupational prestige from the time period studied would probably not have been a great deal different. Moreover, the writers were willing to concede that, even though error may have been introduced by the instrument it would have been of a consistent nature and should not have affected club differences. In addition, the writers were not attempting with finality to establish an absolute status ranking of athletic clubs but only to get some indication of this ordering based on occupational data. The basic approach in gathering the data for this analysis was to develop club membership lists from available sources and then attempt to find occupational information for each member. Most often occupational information was obtained from the City Directories of Staten Island, Brooklyn, and Manhattan. The club lists and occupations for the University A.C., Manhattan A.C., and New York A.C. were listed in Club Men of New York.[37] The following table contains the number of club members for whom occupational data were found and each club's mean score on the North-Hatt Scale.

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[37] Club Men of New York (New York: The Republican Press), 1893).

TABLE IV*

Ranking of Athletic Clubs According to the Occupational Prestige of Its Members

| Club | Number of Club Members Sampled | North-Hatt Scale Mean Score | Year |
|---|---|---|---|
| University A.C. | 65 | 81.07 | 1893 |
| Manhattan A.C. | 331 | 78.67 | 1893 |
| Berkeley A.C. | 66 | 78.35 | 1888 |
| New York A.C. | 310 | 78.05 | 1893 |
| Knickerbocker A.C. | 146 | 76.96 | 1899 |
| Crescent A.C. | 131 | 76.52 | 1891 |
| Brooklyn A.A. | 15 | 74.92 | 1886 |
| Staten Island A.C. | 39 | 73.92 | 1885 |
| St. George A.C. | 6 | 71.50 | 1895 |
| Williamsburg A.C. | 12 | 66.08 | 1885 |
| Scottish-American A.C. | 7 | 60.15 | 1885 |

*For the University, Manhattan, Berkeley, New York, Crescent and Knickerbocker A.C. the authors sampled every fifth name from their club rosters. For the other clubs all available names were taken from various Club Books and from Janssen's History of Amateur Athletics. Occupational data was supplied from City Directories of Manhattan, Brooklyn and Staten Island.

The occupational prestige data presented above is very consistent with other sources of club status. Of the first four clubs listed, three are included in the reference Club Men of New York which dealt only with the top social and literary clubs in the city. The New York A.C., the Manhattan A.C. and the University A.C. are the only athletic clubs included in this work. The Berkeley Club which is listed third in prestige, merged

with the University A.C. in 1892. The information is also quite similar to the ranking of clubs based upon membership costs.

Probably the ultimate in class consciousness was the practice of screening spectators at some athletic events. Spectators at the annual athletic games and ladies day events at Travers Island were admitted by invitation only.[38] The annual athletic carnival of the Manhattan A.C. was also attended by invitation. Over 15,000 people were present for the carnival in 1891. "Everyone who entered the gates did so by invitation of the club and the crowd was therefore a fashionable one. The affair was given a social character in this way."[39]

## A Period of Transition

If the 1880's marked the zenith of the large, exclusive athletic clubs, the 1890's were most noted for club bankruptcies and consolidations. Commenting on the deteriorating position of athletic clubs, James E. Sullivan stated:

> Every month witnesses the death of several athletic clubs, but they fade noiselessly away like morning mist and have no public funerals. It is only a few of the more prominent clubs whose plunges into the pool of bankruptcy make a splash loud enough to attract attention.[40]

The most notable failure of this period was that of the Manhattan A.C. From its position as the largest, wealthiest, and most athletically successful club in the city the total collapse of the club came rather quickly. The factors which figured most prominently in the failure of the club was the combination of poor management of the clubhouse and over

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[38] Spirit of the Times, June 27, 1891, p. 1012.

[39] New York Times, September 20, 1891, p. 2.

[40] Spirit of the Times, February 3, 1894, p. 94.

extended credit for the purchase of property beyond the means of the club. In May of 1891, after occupying its new facility on Madison Avenue for only five months, a glowing financial report was published in which it was projected that the club would be free of debt in ten years.[41] By January of the following year intermittent reports of financial uneasiness were circulating. Seeking to dispel these rumors, club officers denied any serious problems claiming that the club had too many rich members to fail.[42] By December, 1892 it was obvious that the club was in serious trouble. In a drastic measure to save the club, the athletic field was offered for sale and athletics, which had been costing between twenty and thirty thousand dollars a year, were dropped.[43] Finally, innundated by law suits from paniced creditors, the club went into receivership despite frantic efforts by members to save it.[44] The receiver tried to keep the club open for a time thinking it might be put back on its feet but these efforts failed and the club was sold in July, 1893 for $456,000.[45] After several futile attempts to reorganize the club, the Piqua Association was formed which reopened the clubhouse under the name of the New Manhattan Club.[46] Unfortunately the management of the new club proved no better than the former and it too folded in less than a year.[47] The clubhouse of the Manhattan A.C. was ultimately acquired by the Knickerbocker

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[41] The New York Times, May 3, 1891, p. 19.

[42] Ibid., January 3, 1892, p. 19.

[43] Ibid., December 20, 1892, p. 3.

[44] Ibid., January 29, 1893, p. 6.

[45] Ibid., July 21, 1893, p. 7.

[46] Ibid., December 16, 1894, p. 3.

[47] Ibid., August 24, 1895, p. 14.

A.C. which by 1900 had established itself as a powerful athletic force in the metropolitan area.[48]

The Manhattan Club was not alone in its financial difficulties. The Staten Island A.C., also one of the "old line" clubs, succumbed to the auctioneer's gavel in 1893 as well.[49] The Staten Island club failed because of a steady decline in membership which was attributed at least in part to the failure of the club to ramain athletically competitive. Many of the club's athletes had defected to other athletic clubs because of the restrictive club policy toward payment of entry fees and training expenses.

The Actor's Amateur Athletic Association, founded with great enthusiasm in 1889, folded after only four years. The membership of less than one hundred members was insufficient to sustain the club. This problem was compounded by laxity on the part of some members in the payment of dues.[50] The paucity of members willing to pay dues regularly was also the cause of the breakup of the Bank Clerks Athletic Association after only two years.[51]

The Berkeley Athletic Club, another of the elite clubs, disappeared from view in 1892 but under somewhat different circumstances. Members of the club who were dissatisfied with the way the club was being managed seized upon the formation of the University A.C. as a solution to their problems. The University A.C. which had been in the talking stages for several years had become a reality in 1891. A merger of these two clubs was effected the following year with the University A.C. taking over all of

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[48]Knickerbocker A.C., Club Book (New York: The Knickerbocker Athletic Club, 1895), p. 38.

[49]New York Times, January 31, 1893, p. 9.

[50]Ibid., June 15, 1893, p. 4.

[51]Ibid., February 19, 1892, p. 2.

the Berkeley A.C.'s facilities including the Berkeley Ladies A.C.[52]

Of the original group of elite athletic clubs only the New York A.C. and the Crescent A.C. emerged intact at the end of a difficult decade. These two clubs which survived this difficult period did so because of good club management and by curbing the tendency to continually acquire property and expand facilities. The Crescent A.C., bucking the downward trend, experienced a steady growth in membership during the first part of this period.[53] By cutting back on expenditures in athletics and reducing other expenses, the New York A.C. was able to maintain a sound financial footing.[54]

The difficulties experienced by athletic clubs during the 1890's can be summarized as consisting primarily of poor management and the over extension of financial resources in the acquisition of property and the extravagances necessary for the "proper" club atmosphere. The financial problems were undoubtedly magnified by the difficult economic times which the country experienced in that decade.

## The Era of Working Class Athletic Clubs

In marked contrast to the two previous decades, the period from approximately 1900 to 1915 was clearly the era of the neighborhood athletic club, the occupational athletic club and other groups which tended to be small and organized expressly for athletic competition. The clubs which developed during this era were, for the most part, without facilities and many of the social preoccupations of the 1880's. In terms of social strata

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[52] Ibid., January 13, 1892, p. 2.

[53] Ibid., April 7, 1894, p. 3.

[54] Ibid., January 14, 1896, p. 6.

represented the clubs increasingly were of lower middle and working class origins. The proliferation of these clubs by 1914 was truly amazing to those who had been involved in amateur athletics in the two previous decades. James E. Sullivan estimated that seven to eight hundred small clubs were scattered about New York City, most of which were made up of ten to fifteen members. The immense growth was due in great part, according to Sullivan, to the board of education's recreation centers.[55]

One of the most successful efforts to organize athletics for working class boys was begun in 1902 by W.A. Clark who called a convention of settlement houses to explore the feasibility of organizing an athletic league. The idea of intersettlement competition was well received and, by 1908, over 10,000 boys were taking part in track, basketball, baseball and wrestling programs. The important role played by the settlement houses in bringing athletic competition to a group previously unserved is best described in the following quote:

> None of these organizations, however, reaches directly the great mass of working boys whose time is occupied in the day and who must seek opportunity for competition at night. For these the settlement houses throughout the city have opened their doors, and in the five years in which they have followed athletics actively they have accomplished wonders.[56]

The lads of the settlement houses proved to be rapid learners and eager participants turning in solid performances in AAU competition. Basketball was a special favorite of this group who managed to take all of the honors in the AAU for two consecutive years in this sport.[57]

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[55] New York Times, April 5, 1914, p. 2.

[56] Spaulding's Official Handbook of the Inter-Settlement Athletic Association (New York: The American Sports Publishing Company, 1908), p. 3.

[57] Ibid., p. 5.

Athletic clubs which were occupationally oriented flourished during this time period. Municipal workers, postal clerks and firemen organized in 1913 and 1914. Business and industry spawned a large number of athletic clubs as well. Notable representatives of this group included the Ford Motor Company Athletic Association, the Milrose Athletic Association formed by Wannamaker Store employees, the General Electric Athletic Association, the Metropolitan Life A.A. and the Building Trades A.A.

Religious organizations responded to the intense athletic interest of the time by forming the Sunday School Athletic League, the Church Athletic League and the Catholic Athletic League. The YMCA and YMHA also developed viable athletic associations. City-wide championships were held by each of these groups involving large numbers of participants and spectators.

Another significant development of this era was the formation of at least three black athletic clubs, the Salem-Crescent A.C., the St. Christopher, and the Smart Set A.C. of Brooklyn. The outstanding performance of black athletes in the Metropolitan District of the AAU attracted widespread attention in 1914.[58]

The year 1913 made competition accessible to still more lower class youth as the first interpark playground athletic championship was held. Under the supervision of William J. Lee, over 1500 boys competed as approximately 5000 spectators cheered them on.[59] The Evening Recreation Center Athletic League was yet another important avenue for lower class

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[58] New York Times, October 18, 1914, p. 4.

[59] Ibid., September 2, 1913, p. 10.

youth to become involved in competitive athletics.[60]

The tremendous growth of athletic clubs representing the middle and working classes did not seem to hinder the elite clubs which survived the 1890's. Most of these clubs continued to prosper financially and do well athletically. Many of the top athletes in the country were still associated with the big athletic clubs. During this time period a few exclusive athletic clubs patterned after the old model were formed. The most notable of these was the City A.C. Although not limited to those of the Jewish faith, a large portion of the membership was Jewish. Wealthy families belonging to the City A.C. included the Baruch, Gimbel, Guggenheim, Knopf, and Rothschild.[61]

This period in time however belonged to the common man. The sheer numbers of athletic clubs is probably the most salient feature of this era. Most of the clubs of the "common man" had no athletic facilities of their own relying heavily on public parks and playgrounds. A few worked out private lease arrangements with larger clubs. Another characteristic of many clubs, especially those associated with business and industry, was their transitory nature. Lacking strong financial backing and the social element which goes with a clubhouse, many of these groups proved to be short lived. A rather causal approach to athletic competition was another feature of some athletic organizations. Often a once-a-year field day of the type held by the employees of Macy's was the extent of their functioning.[62] Another variation was to sponsor three or four competitions during

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[60] Ibid., May 10, 1913, p. 12.

[61] City Athletic Club. Constitution, By-Laws and House Rules (New York: City Athletic Club, 1913), pp. 5-7.

[62] New York Times, May 31, 1913, p. 13.

the summer season and remain inactive for the remainder of the year. This was the pattern of the Socialist Party of Kings County.[63] Nevertheless, this was an age of widespread participation and unparalleled democratization of athletics. Never before had so many people from such a broad spectrum of society had the opportunities which were opened up by the athletic club movement between 1900 and 1915.

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[63] Ibid., August 4, p. 5.